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## ITEMS OF ARMENIAN FOLK-LORE COLLECTED IN BOSTON.

THE folk-lore contained in this article represents only a beginning of what might be collected if any one had time and patience sufficient for the task. For example, at wedding festivals are still sung songs which might be recorded. These will soon be forgotten, for, through the influence of western civilization, customs are changing in Armenia as well as among Armenians coming to America. I have met but two Armenians who remember any such songs. One is unable to speak English, and the other has forgotten nearly every song he ever knew.

I have met with a number of difficulties in the prosecution of my work. It has been hard for me either to understand my informants, or to make myself understood. People who are able to translate from one language into the other have usually been too busy to give time. In order to overcome this difficulty, I paid a man to translate thirty-four questions into the Armenian language. By the aid of these, and of a young Armenian lady who had been in America but one year, I have been able to obtain at least a third of the material here presented.

Another difficulty I have had to encounter has been the belief that I desired to accumulate material with which to make the Armenians seem ridiculous. Even with the assistance of the Armenian preacher who kindly interpreted for me in two instances, it was difficult to induce the people to think differently.

The following items are offered simply as examples of the folk-lore of Armenians in America, so far as they can be learned through translators, and by one who is unacquainted with the language.

### DREAMS.

1. If one dreams of digging potatoes he will have money come to him, or some other good fortune.
2. If one dreams of money being at some particular spot, and on awaking goes in search of it, he will find it as he dreamed. However, he must tell no one of his dream. If he does so, he will find only coal.
3. If one dreams of the living as being dead, he may expect good luck.
4. If one dreams of the dead as living, it is because the dead person's angel has come to visit his spirit while he slept.
5. To dream of a river, or of a spring, is a good sign, provided it is running. But if it is dry, then some one is going to die.

6. If one dreams of a snake, it is the sign of some enemy undertaking to injure him. If the snake bites him, then the troubles that are coming will be too much for him ; if he kills the snake, the trouble will arise, but he will overcome it.

7. To dream of horses is always a good sign, but when the horse is black the good fortune will come sooner than if it were white.

8. To dream of being at a wedding is always a sign of bad luck.

9. If one dreams of seeing a preacher it is a sign that he is going to see the devil.

10. If one dreams of a person dressing, it is a sign of coming trouble. The person putting on the clothes is the one who will be afflicted.

11. To dream about a baby is always a sign of misfortune. If the babe is still in the womb, it is not as bad luck as if it is born. From first to last, the larger the babe the worse the luck. The person who has the babe is the one who will suffer the misfortune.<sup>1</sup>

#### SUPERSTITIONS.

When the left eye twitches it is bad luck. When the right eye twitches it is good luck.

If one's left ear rings, he will hear bad news ; if his right ear, good news.

If the palm of one's right hand itches, his debtor wants to pay him money. If the left palm itches, then he is going to pay out money.

If one's feet itch, he is going to travel. If his face burns, some one is speaking evil of him.

To sneeze is a sign that some one is talking about you.

When one has pimples on his face it is a sign that his mother stole an egg while she was pregnant with him.

When one hiccoughs, it is a sign that he has stolen the dough of the priest.

In some parts of Armenia people account for an eclipse of the sun or moon by saying, "There is war going on somewhere." In other parts they believe the devil to be between them and the eclipsed object. In the places where this latter view is held they will beat drums, tin pans, yell, and make all the noise possible, so as to drive the devil away. As the eclipse passes away they rejoice in their success. If the eclipse occurs in January, it is believed there will be little produce raised the following season. If in February there will

<sup>1</sup> I called to see an Armenian family one evening and found a young man crippled by having a foot crushed. His sister, a young woman about nineteen years of age, had dreamed the night previous of his having a small baby. She had warned him that morning, but the evil was not to be averted. He was thrown out of work for about two weeks.

be a contagious disease sweep away many people ; if in March, there will be much loss of stock, and so on.<sup>1</sup>

Dead bodies are said to rise out of their graves in the night-time and go about the country. They are not, however, flesh and blood as long as the darkness lasts, but are supposed to be so far spiritualized that they have power to assume any form they may choose. Once a dead person who was strolling about in the night, and had taken on the form of a puppy, was picked up by a man who, thinking to keep it, carried it home with him. Next morning the puppy was gone, and in its place was a dead body. Armenians avoid going by a graveyard after night, for fear the dead will follow them.

A shooting star is the sign of some one's death.

When a light is seen rising from a grave (the result of decaying matter), they think it is an indication of holiness.

In a certain part of Armenia there are seven hills in the same community. The Armenians account for them in the following manner : Once upon a time Nero and his army were marching against the city of Harpud with the intention of capturing it. On the spot marked by one of these hills he pitched his camp. During the night the earth opened and swallowed both him and his army. Six other kings hostile to the Armenians have in the course of time encamped in this same neighborhood. Each time the earth has engulfed them. Over the places of burial of the seven armies with their kings have come these seven hills.

The villages nestling around the bases of different hills here and there throughout the country oftentimes have names which indicate that they have been battle-ground in the past. One is named "Sharp to Sharp," having reference to the clashing of swords. Another is called "Judgment," and so on.

At twelve o'clock on New Year's Eve all rivers and springs stop flowing for five minutes. If one should go to a spring when it starts again he would find gold dust pouring from it for a moment or two. There was once a woman who went for a pitcher of water just at this time. On coming to the light the water looked dirty, and without thinking what was the matter she threw it out. Next morning she found a little gold in the bottom of the pitcher.

If neighbor A is not friendly with neighbor B, and one desires that he should be, all he has to do is to secure a lock of B's hair and burn it so that A will get a scent of it. Henceforth he will be friendly with B.

Seeds sown in the new moon will do well ; in the dark of the moon they will not.

<sup>1</sup> I have been unable to get the exact saying for each month.

## DISEASES.

When one is sick, his friends will go to a bush which happens to be growing near the grave of some saint, or near some spot where a saint is once known to have been, and they will tie a rag on the bush and pray to the saint that the sick may get well. The tree will have so many rags sometimes, and of such various colors, that it will look at a distance as if it were in bloom.

Another remedy for sickness is to bathe in a stream and hang a rag on a tree close by.

Still another is to place an egg in a stream of water, but back in a little nook from the current so that it will not be swept away. Any one who picks up the egg will get the disease it was intended to cure.

When a baby is sick it is bathed over the grave of some martyr. In the winter time, water is heated and carried to the grave for this purpose.

When one is possessed with devils, a bowl of water is set in his presence, and a fortune-teller or soothsayer then charms the demons and gets them into the water. They are then taken one at a time and put into a ram's horn, after which the horn is plugged and given to the afflicted one with instructions to bury it deep in his yard.

In case of fever and ague, the sick bathes in a brook which is called "fever and ague brook." Every community has such a brook.

Sometimes when one is sick he will have four priests come. All of them will read aloud and at the same time, but each one will be reading a different scriptural passage. This is expected to cure the sick.

When one is sick he will oftentimes hunt up a fortune-teller who is supposed to know how to charm away disease. The fortune-teller will write something on a piece of paper (no one knows what), and, folding it up, give it to the man with instructions to wear it over his heart, or on his right or left arm, or on his head, or to put it in the water at some place, or anything else which he is disposed to tell him. His instructions faithfully carried out are to work a cure.

A piece of paper which has been blessed by a priest is sometimes put in a silver box and carried about with one in the belief that it will ward off disease.

Some take a blue bead which has been blessed by a priest and carry it concealed on their persons for the purpose of warding off the influence of witches. If there is a bright, pretty child in the family, a blue bead is nearly always concealed in its hair at just about the point "bregma," or a little in front of that, for fear some jealous person will bewitch him.

When one is bewitched, if a piece of the witch's garment can be cut off and burned so that the bewitched person may sniff the smoke from it, he will recover.

If one person meets another individual regularly as he goes to or from his work, and he continually has either good or bad luck, he will attribute it to this individual; or if on the days he meets him his luck is the reverse of what it is on the days when he does not meet him, then the result is the same.

Trees are prevented from being bewitched by putting the skulls of horses or dogs on them. These protect the tree from evil influences and insure its fruitfulness.

RIDDLES.

What is that of which the outside is silver and the inside is gold?

An egg.

I am a small house and my navel is yellow?

An egg.

What is that which is brought by a man, is full of nuts, has no tongue, and yet speaks like a man?

A letter.

When I brought it from market it was one, but when I got it home it was more than a hundred?

A pomegranate.

I have a grandmother who walked all day, and when she got home took up no more space than could be covered by a penny?

A cane.

There is a long intestine which has a flower on its end?

A lighted candle.<sup>1</sup>

Two faucets running, and five brothers catching the water?

Blowing the nose.

It is a long tree, but it has no shade?

A river.

I put five pounds of peas under my head when I go to bed, but on awaking they are gone?

The stars.

What is that which when alive ate grass, but when dead drank men's blood?

Samson's jaw-bone of an ass.

All above is air, all around is water; what is that ox from which was born a cow?

Adam.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The above riddle is not for our wax candles, but corresponds to our old grease torch, which had the wick curled round and round like an intestine in the skillet or whatever vessel contained the grease.

<sup>2</sup> Recited: Adam and Eve.

What is that of which the key is wood and the lock is water?  
Moses with his wand over the Red Sea.

## GAMES.

*Counting-out.* — Any number of people who can crowd around some central spot will place their right hands on the object before them. Some one of the number will then touch the hands in succession with the forefinger of his left hand. As he does so he will repeat a jingle of words, saying one word each time he touches a hand. His words are as follows: —

<sup>1</sup> Ä'ttäck, chö'ötack, shä'mäshä'  
Shä'mshë, <sup>2</sup> chë'är, bëd'ingë' Zä'nöödë';  
Zä'n-vërtz-öö-në, ä'ttäck, lä'rüm,  
Chö'ötäck lä'rüm, bä's mä's.

The hand on which the word "mas" falls is removed, and the jingle is repeated again. This is continued, a hand being removed at each repetition according as it is designated by the last word, until but one hand is left. The hands which have been removed have, at the instant of removal, been put next one's heart in order to warm them. As soon as there is but one hand on the table the person so remaining asks each of those with hands in their bosoms (but asks only one at a time) if his hand is warm. He always replies in the affirmative. The questioner, however, is not willing to take his word, and hence has him to take the hand from his bosom and touch the questioner's cheek. If the hand is warm, he may consider himself free to do as he pleases while others are being questioned. If not warm, then he is required to bury his face in his hands, and to lean forward so as to allow his back to serve as a resting-place for the hands of the other members of the group. One of the party now puts his hand upon the individual's back, and the others in turn place their hands on top of his hand. The original questioner asks the person bending, whose hand is topmost. A guess is made, and if wrong the guesser is pinched or otherwise tortured. The hands are then changed and another guess is made with like conditions. This goes on until the guess is correct, and then the party is released.<sup>3</sup>

## CLUB FIST.

A little group of people form a circle. One of the party closes his fist and places it on the table, or his knee. Another closes his fist,

<sup>1</sup> I have indicated the syllables to be accented by the mark ', placed over the syllable. The sound of vowels has been indicated by Webster's system of marking.

<sup>2</sup> Ch in clear is pronounced like Greek letter X.

<sup>3</sup> The jingle which determines whose hands shall be taken up from the board is meaningless to the players.

and places it on top of this last one, and so on until the last member of the group has done in like manner. Then some one of the number begins at the bottom, and points to each fist in turn. Each time he touches one he says "gōjě" until he has reached the top one; then the conversation takes place as noted in translation below. The one who has been saying "gōjě" begins the conversation and is answered by the party having his hand on top: "Where is the grass? What did you do with it?" "Gave it to the cow." "What did the cow do?" "She gave me milk." "What did you do with it?" "I drank it." "Where is my part of it?" "I drank it."

The questioner at this point, as if in anger, slaps the party who is answering him. All hands are now taken up and replaced again at random, thereby giving a new order. The "gōjě, gōjě, gōjě," etc., is now gone over again, but changes are made for the sake of variety. Another form it takes, starting from the cow, is: "Where's the cow?" "In the table." "Where's the table?" "Under the house." And so they go on. It is to be noted that the game symbolizes beginning at the lowest point of the roots of the grass (gōjě means "roots,") and approaching the surface of the ground, where the gradually grass is found wanting, because the cow has eaten it.

#### CANDLE GAME.

In this game each one chooses a partner. Some one holds a candle, which is usually heavy. A member of the company says: "Donkey! donkey! foolish donkey! why do you hold that candle?" The one having the candle replies: "Who will hold it?" The party who first spoke signifies some member of the group as the one who should hold the candle. He does this by simply calling the name to the individual. However, the party indicated must not reply. Instead, his partner speaks for him, instantly saying, "No." If the party addressed speaks, through mistake, then he must hold the candle and be quizzed as a foolish donkey. If he does not speak, but his partner answers correctly, then the candle remains in the same hands as before. In this case, everything is begun again as at first, and a new party named, with like possible results. Thus the game continues as long as there is a disposition to play.

#### CUSTOMS.

The nails of babies are never cut, because they would then become robbers. The first time the nails are cut, they are buried in the graveyard. Even the older Armenians never allow the parings of their nails to be cast about at random. They gather them together and bury them, or wrap them in paper or rags and hide them in a crack of the wall, fence, or some other place which will afford storage

for them. Armenians never give fire from their hearths when it has but lately been lighted, since it would be bad luck to do so. However, when it has been started for several hours, the privilege may be granted without danger.

It is the custom of Armenians always to face the east when worshipping.

According to informants here, one of the spots where they go annually to worship and say prayers is on the bank of a branch of the Euphrates River. The stream is 120 feet wide at the spot of which I speak, and the bank on either side consists of solid rock, and is 120 to 160 feet in height. The region of country about is mountainous. On top of the rocks, on either side of the stream, are the prints of a horse's hoofs. It is related that once upon a time a saint was being pursued by his enemies for the purpose of persecuting him. He galloped his horse to this spot. The stream was too wide to hope to jump it, and the height of the banks too great to hope to live if he should fall below. However, the enemy were close upon him and he could not turn back without falling into their hands. He chose to risk death in an attempt to escape rather than to endure the torture which would undoubtedly be his lot should he be captured. Hence, appealing to God, he galloped his horse to the precipice and made the leap. Supernatural power aided him, and he landed safely upon the opposite bank. He was now delivered, and went on his way rejoicing. However, the exertion of the horse in making such a leap, and the force with which he alighted, left the print of all four of his hoofs upon each side of the stream. On the side from which he jumped the impression of the hind feet in the solid rock is the most prominent. On the bank where he alighted, the fore feet are most deeply impressed. The tracks on either side are very prominent, and of the exact shape of the horse's hoofs. The annual gathering at this spot is supposed to be on the anniversary of the day upon which the leap was made. Aside from the worship which takes place, individuals will stand some distance from the horse's tracks and make wishes. They will then pitch a certain number of small pebbles, pennies, beads, marbles, or some other small pieces of something at the tracks, naming as they do so some number. If the number of the small objects named go into the tracks the individual's wish will come true. If some other number instead, then it will not.<sup>1</sup>

As Armenians here affirm, one of the things much prized by an Armenian is a visit to Jerusalem. The object of the trip is to see the tomb where Christ was buried. Every Armenian who has

<sup>1</sup> The man who gave me the account of the foregoing has himself visited the spot he described.

enjoyed this privilege is marked while in Jerusalem, as witness of the fact that he has seen his Lord's burial-place. On no other occasion, and for no other purpose, is an Armenian ever tattooed. The tattooing always takes place either on the arm or on the hand, and takes the form of a cross, or the representation of an angel. The man who is so marked becomes in a sense holy. On returning to his country he often retires from business, for fear he may cheat some one. He at least endeavors ever afterward to lead a very exemplary life. He regards himself as having been crucified with Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

In making the sign of the cross, they always use the thumb and two fingers, in order to represent the Trinity. The motions are made from the forehead to the breast, then to the left, back to the right, and finally to the centre of the breast.

On holidays they take food and incense and go to the cemetery. They burn the incense at the graves and offer prayer. The Spirit comes down from heaven, and rests on the grave while they are offering their devotions. They cry, kiss the ground or stone which marks the burial-place, and burn candles about it.

On the festival called Haik's Day, it is the custom for persons to deluge each other with water at every opportunity. It is related that Haik, first king of Armenia, worshipped an image, and that sprinkling was connected with his worship. When Christianity was accepted, the worship of the former image became obsolete. It was deprived of its sacredness, and hence the day upon which such worship was rendered became a gala day. For the sprinkling, which was the custom upon that day, was substituted what has already been referred to,—the lying in wait to drench each other with water.

The story of the Cross Day is told as follows: The cross on which Christ was crucified was left on Mount Calvary, where in time it became covered up with dirt and rubbish. A queen who desired to rescue it from eternal entombment came to Calvary in search of it. She threw money on the ground, and the people scrambled to pick it up. This action she performed over and over again, looking each time that the people arose from their scrambling to see if the cross was in sight. After a while, together with the money, there had been picked away so much dirt, that the cross came to

<sup>1</sup> At a soap factory where I was talking to a number of Armenians, an Irishman got into a fight with one of them, and the two men were trying to strike each other in the face with soap moulds. An Armenian bearing the mark mentioned, who was standing near by, tried to separate them, and was struck for his interference. The print of the mould was left upon his bare arm, and he evidently suffered considerable pain. Nevertheless, he kept good-humored, and still continued his endeavors to pacify the two half-brutes (for such they seemed to me).

view. The day upon which it was found was called "Cross Day." Henceforth, the anniversary of that day has been observed. Religious services are held in the church, and ceremonies are performed. The crosses which are in the church are removed from their places and put in water, where they remain for three days. After this they are taken out and restored to their former positions.

*Easter.*—On Easter morning the sun dances, and there is no other morning in the year when such is the case. Since they cannot look directly at the sun, they have mirrors into which they look in order to see it dance. It is said, too, that very seldom is there an Easter morning which is not clear. Prior to Easter there is a seven weeks of self-denial, and, in a measure, fasting. Before the fast-time begins there is a week given up to feasting, dancing, and frivolity. The period of fasting has become personified, until they imagine that a spirit oversees its observance. The name of the spirit is "Great Fast." The seven weeks' fast begins at midnight, and on the evening previous they talk of Great Fast being over behind the mountain. At twilight they say: "Now he is on top of the mountain." A little later, when it is dark, they will say: "Now he is in the valley." Still later: "He is leaving the valley." Thus they go on speaking of him as drawing nearer and nearer, until they will finally say: "He is now on the housetop waiting to come down." At midnight he comes down the chimney, and sits in the fireplace. He goes to everything in the room and smells of it, to the cooking vessels, etc.; and even smells of the mouths of those who are asleep, to see if they have been eating butter, grease, or any other forbidden article of food. In preparation for this scrutinizing investigation, on this night after supper it is customary to scour all the dishes with ashes. Everything must be clean. Some people will even wash their mouths with ashes. After his examination, Great Fast goes back and takes his seat in the chimney, where he sits for forty days in order to watch the people, and to be sure that they do not do any of the things forbidden for that period. However, though he sees everything, he cannot be seen himself. He is invisible.<sup>1</sup>

For three days before Easter the Armenians will gather at a churchyard for the purpose of breaking eggs. Two persons will

<sup>1</sup> My informant tells me that when he was a child he awoke one morning while it was still twilight and was frightened to see something black in the fireplace. He asked his mother what it was. She replied that it was Great Fast, and told him to cover up his head while she drove the spirit away. He did so, and on being told a little later to uncover his head, he was unable to see anything out of the ordinary. Later years, however, revealed the fact that it was a kettle he had seen, and that on covering up his head, his mother had carried it out of the room.

each take an egg, and one of them will hold his egg stationary while the other strikes it with the point of his egg. If A is holding the stationary egg and B is doing the striking, then, in case A's egg cracks, he turns the other end and lets B strike again. If the other end is cracked, B gets the egg and A must produce another egg to be treated as before and with like possible results. If B's egg cracks, then he turns the other end of the egg and strikes again. If it suffers in like manner, he loses his egg and must supply another, whereupon A does the striking until he forfeits his right by losing an egg. Thus they go on breaking eggs, until oftentimes one couple has broken as many as a hundred. The man with the strongest egg will of course win the most eggs from his opponent. These cracked eggs which he has won he sells at a reduced price. Sometimes a man will pay a dollar for a strong egg before he enters into a contest, if there is evidence to prove that he is really getting a strong one.

Formerly, Easter eggs were always colored red in order to represent the blood of Christ. They are usually colored red now, but are beginning to vary somewhat.

*G. D. Edwards.*